



Most health effects associated with asbestos occur long after a person has been exposed.

Frequently Asked Questions About Asbestos

WHAT IS ASBESTOS?

Asbestos is a mined mineral that is one of the most common environmental hazards in the world. It is present in more than 3000 manufactured goods. Products that contain asbestos include construction materials such as shingles and cement pipes, friction materials to include brakes, gaskets, and clutch pads, asphalt coats and sealants, and other similar products.

The advantages of asbestos products are the result of its resistance to heat and chemicals, high tensile strength and low cost compared to man-made materials.

WHAT ARE THE SOURCES OF EXPOSURE?

Asbestos fibers enter the body through inhalation or ingestion. People who work with asbestos-containing products are most likely to be exposed by breathing in the material. Ingestion of asbestos fibers occurs primarily from drinking water contaminated from natural sources or from asbestos-reinforced concrete water pipes that are under going gradual deterioration. Asbestos fibers have also been found in foods, especially processed foods.

An estimated 20% of buildings have asbestos-containing materials. Asbestos in buildings is not released into the air unless there is physical damage to the material. Renovation projects or demolition of buildings that contain asbestos can release the asbestos fibers into the air. The asbestos concentration of ambient air in some urban areas is greater than in buildings containing intact asbestos materials. All Army buildings are required to be surveyed for asbestos containing material. The local Department of Public Works (DPW) Environmental Office maintains a building inventory and is responsible for ensuring renovation projects are conducted in accordance with asbestos regulatory requirements. Local Industrial Hygienists are responsible for identifying any potential asbestos exposures at worksites.

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH HAZARDS OF EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS

Asbestos is well recognized as a health hazard and is highly regulated. Negative health effects associated with asbestos generally occur after heavy exposure. No acute health effects due to asbestos exposure are known. Long-term effects may include the disease called asbestosis, which is a chronic lung reaction. The diagnosis of asbestosis is made by documented exposure history, clinical exam, imaging studies, and pulmonary function tests.

Development of cancers is a primary concern for persons exposed to asbestos. Lung cancer and mesothelioma, a rare cancer of the membranes lining the chest and abdominal cavities, have been related to asbestos. Ingestion of asbestos may be associated

with cancer of the esophagus, stomach and intestines but the evidence is not conclusive. There are no studies available on the reproductive or developmental effects of asbestos exposure. Individuals who are exposed to asbestos and who also smoke have a much-increased risk of developing lung cancer. The health effects of asbestos exposure do not occur until long after a person has been exposed.

HOW CAN I PREVENT EXPOSURE TO ASBESTOS?

- Ensure all Army building renovations are coordinated and cleared by the DPW Environmental Office prior to project initiation.
- Residents of government housing should inform the Housing Office of required building repairs promptly.
- Supervisors of employees who work with asbestos products must ensure that employees are informed of the hazard, trained properly, and issued the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Employees are responsible to protect themselves by wearing the issued PPE correctly.